News Release

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OMAHA -- The Army Corps of Engineers plans to release the Revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement (RDEIS) for the Missouri River Master Water Control Manual Review and Update at the end of August.

The RDEIS document will present a range of alternative water control plans with and without a spring rise and low summer flows from Gavins Point Dam. There are a number of common features including drought conservation measures, Fort Peck flows, unbalanced reservoir storage, and adaptive management initiatives. The document will also present a comprehensive description of the economic, social and environmental impacts on flood control, navigation, fish and wildlife, hydropower, water supply, water quality, recreation and irrigation.

A public comment period will follow the release of the RDEIS. During that time, workshops and hearings will be conducted from Helena, Mont., to New Orleans, La., to explain the plans and take comments from individuals, tribes, states, other federal agencies and interest groups on the impacts.

"We have come to a very important point in the review and update process for the Missouri River Master Manual," said Brig. Gen. Carl Strock, Northwestern Division Engineer. "We feel it is important to present more than one plan and to receive comments from the people affected by the proposed changes.

"In addition, we are looking forward to the report from the National Academy of Sciences due in October. The Corps and the Environmental Protection Agency asked the Academy to review the body of science on the Missouri River to aid us in developing effective adaptive management initiatives to help the protected birds and fish. The report will help us prepare a final plan for managing the projects in the basin," Strock said.

"Our ultimate goal is to select a water control plan that:

- meets the contemporary needs of the basin, as defined by the people of the basin,
- serves the authorized purposes of the river system, and
- does not jeopardize the continued existence of fish and birds listed for protection under the Endangered Species Act."

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One alternative that will be considered is the current operational plan. All new alternatives in the RDEIS contain common features. They are:

- Drought conservation measures. Navigation service levels would be reduced earlier in a drought than under the current water control plan. During severe droughts, like the one in the 1930s, support for navigation would be eliminated at a higher storage level than under the current plan. This would maintain more water in the three largest reservoirs in Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota during drought.

During a drought such as the one in the 1980s, these measures would maintain total storage at 43 million acre feet (MAF) compared to 39 MAF for the current plan.

- Fort Peck flow changes. Releases would be increased up to 23,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) for three weeks in May and June approximately every third year. A mix of cold water through the powerhouse and warm water over the spillway would trigger pallid sturgeon spawning by increasing both flow and temperature in the river reach downstream from the dam.

- Unbalancing the three upper reservoirs. Annually one of the big reservoirs would be lowered approximately three feet to allow vegetation to grow around the rim and then refilled to inundate the vegetation. The unbalancing would rotate among the three lakes on a three-year cycle. The practice would benefit the three protected species - pallid sturgeon, least tern and piping plover - as well as young forage and game fish in the lakes.

- Adaptive management. This is an overall strategy for dealing with change and scientific uncertainty. It promotes testing hypotheses and exploring promising changes based on sound scientific data and analyses.

All comments received during the public comment period will be fully considered prior to the selection of a water control plan and the preparation of a final EIS.

Copies of the Revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Summary will be available at www.nwd.usace.army.mil or by writing to: Project Manager, Master Manual Review and Update, 12565 West Center Road, Omaha, NE 68144.

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